

A Story of Glenwood Springs

Her Word and Her Bond



By

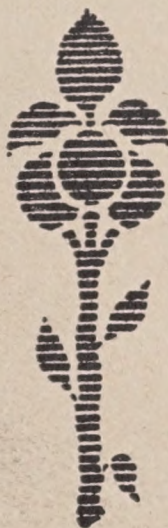
Mabel Baldwin Beardsley

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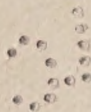


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No. 1

To My Friend
MT. SOPRIS

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HOW THE SEA CAME TO GLENWOOD

"All the world loves a lover," I'm sure you've been told,
And the grand old story will never grow old,
Of lover brave, and maiden shy,
Of ache and pain and bursting sigh,
Of heart with love's bright flame afire,
Coquettish ways that feed desire,
Of daring risks and wooing bold,
Of maiden fair, however cold.

His name was Atlantic Ocean, and hers Mt. Sopris fair:
He had loved her long and loved her true
But spite of all that he could do,
His suit he could not declare.
He had tried for ages and ages—
(No longer young was he)—
To reach her feet and tell his love;
But shy and cold was she.
She stood with head among the clouds,
Nor ever looked his way—
Or if she did, he could not tell,
So far apart were they.

He fumed and fretted, groaned and roared,
With desperate passion rocked—
With mighty fervor threw himself
Far towards the west
Where she did rest;
But even this was all in vain—
He only slipped right back again.
His angry tears he threw about,
And splashed in vain endeavor;
She still stood cold and proud and grim,
As if to her a thought of him
Came never.

Now, a Jersey maid, who had loved him long,
And was to leave him soon,
In walking on the beach one day,
Saw his distress, and begged the boon
Of confidence.

"My dear old Neptune," quoth this maid,
"You know I love you well,
So stop your spiteful splashing
And to me your troubles tell."
So to this friend so opportune, with sympathy so great,
He opened free his inmost soul, his woes he did relate.
And she, in glee, did thus agree:
"I'll act as go between,
For straight unto your love I'm bound,
Before a week this e'en.
To Colorado's clime so mild,
To Glenwood's springs so high,
I'll carry your love so strong and true,
To the Rocky mountains so coy and shy".

Then he gurgled and laughed, and lapped the sand
At her feet in highest glee.

"Dear maid, what can I do for you
Who do so much for me?
Tell to my love, my dearest love,
How I faint to see her face,
How my arms for ages innumerable,
Her form have longed to embrace.
They tell me her brow is snowy—
But her youth I shall ever sing,
And the flowers so sweet
That bloom at her feet
Have not one half the charm complete,
One word from her can bring.

* Take these few drops, these briny tears,
And these few grains of sand,
As guerdon of the love I bear—
Leave them in her hand."

* * * * *

"My country, 'tis of thee," we sing,
Nor east, nor west, should feel—
And sea, and plain, and mountain high
Our fellowship shall seal.

* A bottle of sea water and sand brought from Asbury Park, N. J.



THE SKY was blue as a sapphire, the air like wine, the sun brilliant as only a Colorado sun can be, and school was out. Two young teachers, coming down the steps, were met by another girl, who greeted them with the startling words:

"Well, Eliza, we're minus a home!"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Why, Mrs. Schofield calmly informed me, two hours ago, that her brother and his wife were coming out to live with her, therefore she must have our room—very sorry—likes us so much—but had promised—and so forth and so on!"

"But when?" and Eliza stared in dismay.

"Next week. Oh, she'll not turn us out, she magnanimously assures us—we can bunk in the little room until suited elsewhere."

"That little two-by-three room! Not much! I'll buy a tent first. Oh, dear! I had hoped we were settled for the winter, at least. But there must be some good rooms in town, now that the season is over. Let's ask Eloise—she's always posted."

Eloise was the postmistress—a stanch friend to the three girls. With the assurance of perfect welcome, they went to the postoffice, made their way to the inner sanctum, and gave forth their woes.

"Can you recommend us to a place? You know everybody."

Eloise considered a moment, then a sudden gleam came to her eyes, as she replied:

"Yes, indeed! the very thing! Sarah doesn't like her quarters—suppose you all take my house!"

"What do you mean?"

"The Shaeffers have given up my house, and it is for rent. So you see I'm out of a home, too. I'll make good terms with you."

"What would we do with a house?" gasped Sarah. "You're joking," asserted Eliza, while Anna demanded, "Your terms!"

"I want a home, so do you, and we might test our friendship by living together. I'll give you my house, rent free, for three years, if you'll board me in return. At that rate you can hire help—housekeeping always is cheaper than boarding—and we can have a jolly, comfortable home by ourselves. All I ask is that I shall have a good home, with no care or thought of the engineering thereof, for each day is increasing my work at the office. The Shaeffers pretended to give me good board and lodging, but right there in my own house they starved and froze me out, and I am lonely and homesick since mother left me. Now, what do you say?"

"Say, why, it's a perfect snap!" exclaimed Eliza, while Anna bit her lip doubtfully, and Sarah declared, "You're not the only one who is homesick. It would be Heaven!"

"Then it's settled," sighed Eloise.

But Anna brought forth pencil and paper from her school satchel. "Now, let's 'figger': this means business.

Can we keep house without a girl? and if not, can we afford to keep one? Eloise, you're not in this."

Sarah refused to look at the paper. "I don't care what it costs. I'll go my third if it takes nine-tenths of my salary. 'Figgers' can't stand for the delight of a home with you girls."

"Eloise, you're a perfect angel!" exclaimed Eliza. "What makes you so good to us? You're giving up the rent of that lovely big house."

"Like Sarah, I feel that some things are better than money. But you young greenies may not know how to run a house—remember, I'll have none of it—and you may be out of pocket, after all."

"Oh, we'll risk it! It's worth the trial."

"But perhaps I'll pose as less of an angel, when you hear further. Each one of you must swear before a bonafide attorney that you will stand by this bargain for three years."

Eliza gave a dismayed little gasp, which she immediately tried to cover, while Sarah said, readily: "If I were only sure of my school for that time, I wouldn't hesitate a minute," and Anna asserted, "With the greatest of pleasure."

Eloise smiled knowingly. "I'm not going to have you giddy young things flying off with the first young man who smiles at you, and leave me minus a home, with a vacant house upon my hands. Two parties now stand ready to take a lease for that time upon it, but I am considering my own comfort, as well as yours. I shall feel everlastingly obliged—you are doing me a

great favor—but it must be fixed up in business style. I can't trust you Eastern girls."

"How long since you were an Eastern girl yourself?" demanded Anna. "If we sign papers, will you do the same? We don't care to get nicely settled, and then have you tire of our company and demand regular tenants. I, for one, am going to make money enough from your generosity to keep me in my old age."

"You're more than welcome to every cent that you can save. I am getting the best of the bargain and shall sign willingly. It will be so lovely to settle down in my old age and have three little sisters to care for me," laughed Eloise, who, upon the strength of her ten years' seniority, often assumed elder-sisterly airs toward the others. "Shall we commission Anna to make out the papers?"

"Yes—but do tell us what they are to say," and Sarah looked curious.

"You may make out what you please for me to sign, but yours must promise that you will take this house, rent free, for three years—you, in the mean time, to remain unmarried, even unengaged, or pay me the sum of \$900—which is less than either of the other parties would have paid, had they taken the house. They wanted it for three years."

"But not each one to sign for \$900!" asked Sarah, her eyes growing big. "You mean \$300 apiece?"

"Certainly, little simpleton," laughed Eloise. "Are you looking upon me already as such an ogre?" and she made this an excuse to draw "the littlest one" within

her arms. The self-reliant girl had a very tender place in her heart for the rather timid younger one, who had left her Ohio home and friends to seek health among these mountains. Years ago Eloise had come upon the same quest, but with a mother to make home for her, and Sarah's youth and shyness appealed to her as the buoyant cheerfulness of the other two could not.

In their Eastern city home Anna and Eliza had been chums since life began. When, after their first year of teaching, Anna's health had declined, and she seemed about to follow her mother to an early grave, it was decided that Colorado should be her refuge. But father could not stay, even if he accompany her, so with her usual decisiveness she refused to leave home, until her quick mind settled upon the plan that Eliza should go, too. This was finally arranged, Eliza being more than ready to "see the world" and try new experiences. Instead of school, Anna settled upon music as a means of livelihood, as being less confining. They now had been in Midvale since the June before, Eliza had been teaching for three months and Anna already was far upon the road to recovery. They were bright and lively, favorites with the young people, Eliza especially, having nearly every marriageable young man in town at her feet, as she teased and flirted with each in turn.

* * * * *

It was a very gay little family that sat down to the first dinner in the new home. Anna, as having the most leisure, was given charge of the household, the other two to be her aids. It seemed like a huge joke, at

first, although the papers which each had securely locked in her most private drawer, gave the affair a business-like aspect, which otherwise it might have lacked. The merry household, with Eloise to chaperon, became the favorite resort of the young people, and the months passed, with the mixture of work and play—busy brain and happy heart—that is the normal condition of mankind.

One morning in July, Sarah and Eliza had started for a few hours at the pool, when a young man, walking rapidly toward them, stopped, removed his hat, as if about to ask a question, then exclaimed: "Why here she is now!" and simultaneously with Eliza's, "Why, Edgar!" seized that young lady's hand. "Well, this is good! I was just about to inquire for you." Introductions followed, and Sarah imagined that Eliza, for the first time to her knowledge, had lost a bit of her self-possession. But that might easily occur with so sudden an encounter and she soon forgot it, in Mr. Boice's exclamations over the beauties of this, his first trip West.

"I am on my way to California; came in on this morning's train, and am going to stop over in Midvale for three days—if I may," and he looked inquiringly at Eliza.

"Certainly—we shall be delighted! but we don't own Midvale, you know." A slight flush came to the girl's face, but she spoke saucily, and put her hand more securely within Sarah's arm, as she continued—"I am glad that you are to stay so long. Anna will be delighted to see you, and I want you to meet Miss Marshall

and to see our lovely home. And there are some beautiful climbs we must take. Let's get up a burro party, Sarah!"

The young man was duly presented at the house, and came each day from his hotel to spend the short time with his friends. Climbs by daylight, climbs by moonlight, swims in the pool, gay afternoons on the lawn, evenings at the large hotel while the band played and the fountain rivalled it—all that could be crowded into the three days was done. But through it all Edgar could not contrive to see Eliza alone. That young lady was her usual sweetly smiling self—upon others, sad to say, as well as upon him—but she very adroitly managed to be always one of three, at least never one of the "two" that Edgar so gladly would have considered "company." But patience ceases to be a virtue, in time. Upon his last afternoon a merry party, with burros, had climbed Mount Lookout, eaten a picnic tea, wandered around by twos and threes and groups, but never an Eliza for poor Edgar. As they started back, in time to reach town before dark, he secured possession of her burro, and, with the reins around his arm, busied himself in repairing some imaginary fault in his own saddle. This succeeded so well that the others were out of sight around the first curve before he turned to Eliza, who sat upon her burro in great impatience. "Edgar, do hurry! It will be dark before we get down."

"All right; I'm ready now," turning gaily to her, his own burro being directly in front of hers. But when she reached for the reins he retained them, saying:

"Excuse me, Eliza, but I must have a word with you first. You know what I want to say. Why have you avoided me so?"

"Why, I haven't. I have only tried to give you a good time." She laughed, but would not look at him.

"Well, I'm going to have my 'good time' now," and he came to her side with a very determined air. Eliza gave her beast a quick cut, but it only responded with a flip of one ear, and Edgar continued:

"Didn't you say, two summers ago at Elberon, that if I'd take you 6,000 feet above sea level, you'd say 'yes'?"

"What if I did?"

"Isn't Mt. Lookout more than that? You know it is."

"But I hadn't seen any Colorado boys then," began Eliza, playing with her whip, but slyly watching him. But he seized her hands with a change in his face that instantly sobered her, as he demanded:

"Do you mean it? Eliza, stop playing with me! I have taken you at your word, jest or earnest—have planned this stopover purposely to follow your own conditions, and now, as a man, not a boy, I demand your final answer."

The girl did not know the stern man before her. All her life she had played with him, secure in his love, happy in her own; the new tone angered as well as frightened her, and she replied, proudly:

"I never will answer while you speak in that tone."

And then Edgar became his old self again, as he said:

"Forgive me, dear. And be good to me, Eliza. Ah,

sweetheart! say 'yes!'" But no 'yes' was needed, as Eliza turned to him with the look in her face that he had waited for so long. She had been thoroughly frightened. And those stupid burros stood lazily unheeding the sweet things being said and done right in their midst. But perhaps they had become hardened through much experience. The minutes slipped by—also Edgar's chance of taking the evening train for which he was scheduled. But love's young dream surely is worth missing trains for, especially a dream with so glorious a setting of lowering sun, grandeur of mountain. The world was made for two!

It took Edgar's most wheedlesome coaxing and tenderest entreaties to gain Eliza's consent to spend the remainder of the evening alone with him, but he finally prevailed, and carried her off to the most obscure corner of the large piazza. And innocent Eloise suspected no designs upon her cherished home, although Anna, as an old friend, was not so oblivious to "might be's."

Edgar retired that night, to dream of making love to a little brown burro, while swimming in the pool; waking to the blissful realization that it was only a dream. But poor Eliza had no dreams. As she and Anna were preparing to retire she was constrained to share her delicious secret. And Anna coolly remarked:

"But you are bound."

"What do you mean?" asked Eliza, entirely puzzled.

"Do you mean to tell me, Eliza Morris, that you have forgotten the paper that you signed before Judge Strieby?"

Eliza blinked stupidly. "Oh! surely she won't hold me to that!"

Anna looked indignant. "Would you have the face to ask anything else? It cost her something to have all those papers witnessed, and she has lost nearly a year's rent already. I wouldn't be the first one to go back on our bargain for all the men in the world. I've no more to say," and Anna turned her back so that she might not see the real misery in her friend's face.

"You unfeeling brute! Oh, how shall I tell Edgar!" and the laughing, care-free, saucy Eliza was transformed into the dampest of weeping maidens, as she threw herself upon the bed.

When Edgar came in the morning, it was a very sober-faced young lady who accompanied him to the train; and after the fifteen-minute walk and talk, it was an angry and sore-hearted young man who started for California. Eliza, with tears, had told him that she could not even be engaged to him—she had forgotten, last night, that she was bound for three years. What this "nonsensical bond" might be, Edgar could form no idea, for the girl would not betray Eloise. He threatened to miss his train and "find out" from "the girls," but this Eliza would not allow, changing from tears to dignity in so frosty a manner that he could not persist. So, bidding her good-by with all his native gentlemanliness, but with a coldness that chilled her through and through, he boarded his train. His last words, "playing with me," rang in Eliza's ears for many a day. One comfort

came later—a letter, asking no favors, making no moan, but ending with the words:

“I have loved you too long to give you up readily. If you should see any reason to change your mind, a word will wipe out that last morning’s unhappiness, and I shall be as ever,yours, EDGAR.”

None but Anna knew of the little romance, and even she wondered at the recklessness with which Eliza more than outdid her former flirtations.

Now, a certain young dentist, Colorado born and reared, was among the more settled young men in town. Dr. Billings had a good practice, a solid bank account, was considered a fine catch, and had been ogled by girls without number. A pleasant, agreeable fellow, he still was rather inclined to let the ladies very much alone. But Sarah’s shyness had appealed to him from the moment of his introduction. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, a friendship grew up between them. Many evenings he spent quietly at the house, or as a ready escort, a gallant cavalier, for each and all from Eloise to Sarah. Soon all came to look upon him as a good, steady, all-around friend, ready to “fit in” at odd moments and in divers places. If any one thought of him as Sarah’s especial property, it was only because of an occasional drive, or play, or dance, which was offered to her alone. Usually he was “squire to all the dames,” if to one, and Sarah was the first to read the true condition of affairs—rather from her own attitude than from his. When a girl from whom other men cannot bring a blush, a start or an extra heartbeat, begins to watch for the coming of one

man, blushes when he enters the room, and experiences palpitation when he looks at her, something surely is to pay.

One Sunday in midwinter he took her for a drive behind a span of horses, for being a lover of animals, he used his auto for business, his team for pleasure. The merry jingle of bells, the rapid motion in the sparkling air, the glisten of innumerable sunbeams upon the wealth of snow, the radiant blue of the sky, and last, but not least, the manly fellow beside her, who tucked her in with the tenderness of a woman, but handled the spirited horses with the strength and skill of a fine horseman—all tended to make Sarah think Colorado little short of heaven, and she the most gloriously happy of girls.

For a time they skimmed along rapidly. Then as they slowed up a bit, and came in view of Mt. Sopris, gloriously clothed in white from foot to crest, he stopped the horses. They sat quietly taking in the beauty of the scene for a time, when Dr. Billings began, abruptly:

"You have been in Colorado both summer and winter, now. Could you be content to stay here always?" He spoke without looking at her, for no one appreciated her shyness more than he. She knew what he meant—the overwhelming joy tied her tongue. Before she could frame the most inarticulate of replies, he, thinking that she did not comprehend, looked down at her.

"How do you like my team? It is yours—if you take me too." The tenderness of a big heart that had kept its affection for one woman was in voice and eyes.

Why was it that, as she looked up to meet and accept it, a hateful paper came before her eyes? a paper giving her word and her bond! The glory faded, and with a frightened look she gasped: "Oh, no! Oh! you mustn't say so! Oh, please" So pitiful a face the doctor seldom had encountered even in his dental chair, and pity conquered love at sight of her distress. Laying his big left hand over both of hers, he said, soothingly:

"There, little one! let it pass. Could thought of me bring such terror to your face? That is the worst thing that ever has happened to me. To be afraid of me! Oh, Sarah!"

She grasped his hand—the comfort of its bigness!—and pleaded:

"Oh, Doctor Billings, I'm not afraid of you. You're the very best friend I have; but, oh, you mustn't ask me that! Indeed, you mustn't."

"Well, it's all right, if only you'll not be afraid of me. Let me still be your best friend, and I'll never speak of the other again. May I?"

"Oh, yes—I shall be so glad!" and she settled down close to him with a sigh of relief. And it was some minutes before she realized that she was still clinging to that big left hand. Then she looked up with a vivid blush as she released it, and found him looking teasingly down at her. He did not act precisely like a disconsolate lover.

"Why did you let go? I was enjoying it so much!" And Sarah surprised herself by replying, quite à la Eliza:

"Do you want to let the horses run away and kill

me?" His voice was very loverlike again, as he replied:

"They'd have to kill me, before they should hurt you!"

After this things went on as usual between the doctor and Sarah, but the little pain in her heart was intensified by the refrain which continually rang in her ears. "Never! never!" He had said "Never."

The second summer in this ideal home had come. If Eliza was a bit "cranky" at times, or unusually reckless, and if Sarah appeared even quieter than ever, the other two took no heed, Anna being the only one in Eliza's secret. But there came a time when Eloise suddenly lost her brightness. She was seen to read and re-read a long letter, was abstracted at meals, quiet, almost sad, but, if anything kinder and more gentle than ever.

"Girls!" exclaimed Eliza, one Sunday. A big excursion—American Bar Association or 'sich'—came in last night. It is to go out tomorrow morning. Do let's go over to the Colorado and see if there's any one from home."

"Why, where is it from?" asked Anna.

"From all over, goosie. I'm interested in the New Jersey contingent, of course."

"And I in the Ohio," added Sarah, eagerly. Come Eloise, it will cheer you up. And don't you know any lawyers in Chicago?"

"Plenty of them, years ago. But let us go this evening, while the orchestra plays. The excursionists may be scattered this afternoon."

That evening the four went early to the hotel. A promenade through the rooms and anterooms in quest of possible acquaintances, and then they settled down on one of the verandahs to enjoy the music.

"They are a fine looking lot of men, if none of them are our friends," remarked Anna, as they watched the strangers, who rather dominated everything this evening. But it was Sarah who at length exclaimed, "There's Mr. Reynolds!" and darted toward two men who stood admiring the changing colors in the fountain. All shyness had disappeared as she greeted a home friend. The friend's companion was presented and the three moved toward our group, Mr. Reynolds remarking:

"Mr. Sinclair is not of our party; he is staying here for the summer. I'm immensely pleased that I happened along to bring you two together."

"And you have always lived in my city, Mr. Sinclair, and we had to come to Colorado to meet each other? How odd!" and Sarah laughed happily, as she presented the two men to her friends.

Mr. Sinclair proved to be a man of position, money, and talent, a widower with two children. For the four girls, this really was their gayest summer. Through the magic of money the days flew by, enriched by luxuries to which they, as wage-earning girls, would not have aspired. Delightful drives, rides on the tally-ho, excursions here and there, cosey little dinners at the Colorado, followed by private dances—all were offered with a friendliness, a begging of favor, that Eloise could not well refuse, especially as he so eagerly accepted invitations to

their home, and entertainment at their hands. Sarah, apparently, was the principal object of these courtesies, from the standpoint of a common home, but it was soon seen that Anna was the real attraction. But Anna kept her own counsel, until, a week after his departure, a letter arrived from Ohio, and she coolly presented his respects to the girls, as requested. Then they saw that this was really serious—widowers with children are not apt to correspond with ladies upon so short an acquaintance, unless something more than friendship is contemplated. But Anna continued to be her cool, straightforward self, delivering messages from Mr. Sinclair's letters, as a most everyday affair. Sarah and Eliza secretly watched to see how Eloise would take what so obviously meant the frustrating of her plans, and were rather indignant at her apparent unconcern, when each of them was suffering in secret, because of her.

One Saturday morning in October, after stopping for the mail, Anna and Eliza went to spend the morning at the pool. Letters were read, papers glanced through, bits of news exchanged, and Anna took up her one unopened letter. She turned it over once or twice, glanced uneasily at Eliza, then broke the seal very quietly. It was just what she had expected from the tone of previous letters—an offer of marriage; plain, manly straightforward, ending with a bit of sentiment that pleased even the cool Anna.

"Fate gave me no time last summer to woo my lady-love, but just say the word, and in two weeks I will come to Midvale, and devote a fortnight to showing you how

necessary you are to me. In the mountains I found rest and health and strength; do let me say happiness, as well."

It was impossible to keep the blood from surging to her face as Eliza turned from her book to ask:

"Well, hasn't he any message for the rest of us this time, or is 'this private?'"

"He—I—no, there's—that is—I believe not," and Anna turned in confusion to the letter again.

"I told you my secret; aren't you going to tell me yours?" demanded Eliza. And Anna confessed.

"You must be the first one to know it. If I say 'yes,' he is coming in two weeks to—to—and I shall write tonight." Still blushing furiously, she did not look at the other girl, waiting for one of the impulsive avowals of delight and affection naturally to come from Eliza. But none came. Eliza only turned quietly away, put both hands to her face, and Anna, in amazement, saw the tears dropping from between her fingers. Like a flash came remembrance of the night, over a year ago, when Eliza had made a similar confession, and had been received with coldness and reproach. In the light of these last months, her own conduct at that time appeared like the most wanton cruelty. There came to her an idea of what the girl had been suffering all that year, with no sympathy from the friend for whom she had left an ideal home. These thoughts led to a sudden recollection of that hateful paper locked in Eloise's desk. She had forgotten it entirely! Did it not apply to her as well as to Eliza? She went hastily to her friend's side.

"Eliza a year ago you called me an unfeeling brute. That is just what I am. You poor dear! Don't cry so! Let's go to Eloise. Surely she'll not hold us to that silly promise."

"That's what I said a year ago," sobbed Eliza. "What good will it do me now?"

"Oh, dear! what can we do? I positively can't give Mr. Sinclair up. Eliza, they say that the depth of that little spring over there has never been sounded; let us jump in and end it all."

Her answer was Eliza's old merry laugh. To associate cool, unromantic Anna with suicide was too utterly funny. Then her face clouded again as Anna turned away with trembling lips. "I suppose you can sympathize a bit with me, now, and can feel what a precious year I have spent. Shall you tell him to come?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Anna, dejectedly. "Shall we risk telling Eloise?"

"You needn't say 'we'—I'm out of it now. Yes, tell Eloise. That will give you your lover, and he can pay her your three hundred dollars. Mr. Sinclair is wealthy—you never will feel it!"

"Eliza, if you ever speak in that way again our friendship is at an end forever," and Anna turned furiously upon her. "I was cruel to you, and have owned to it, and now when I am in the same trouble, you haven't one bit of feeling for me. You have less excuse than I had, for you know what it means to give up the man you love, and I didn't."

"But you haven't given yours up yet—and I—I've

had a year of purgatory."

"Your purgatory came a year sooner than mine, that's all," and two tears ran down Anna's face.

At this unprecedented occurrence, Eliza's heart softened, and linking her arm in her friend's as they started for home, she said, sadly:

"You and I mustn't quarrel. We need each other more than ever. But I don't know how to help one bit."

They stopped for a moment upon the curb of the spring, and Anna, after watching the bubbles, said tragically: "We would scald to death, before drowning, wouldn't we?" Again Eliza laughed, and Anna smiled, too, as she said, resignedly, "I guess we'll have to live through it, somehow."

So the precious letter was kept a secret from the others, and days and nights passed while Anna tried to make up her mind what to write. Meanwhile Eloise had not regained her old, happy manner, and one afternoon she came into the sitting-room where all were assembled. Her face was really white as she asked:

"Girls, will you help me get ready for the evening train? I have had bad news from home."

Sarah came quickly to her side. "Is it what has been troubling you since last summer?"

"Yes. My sister's husband is failing every day. The doctors have almost given him up—and they have sent for me. My sister is not living, you know—she died four years ago, leaving the three little ones you have heard me speak of so often."

"And now the father is going, too. How sad!" said

Eliza, her eyes filling with tears. "Yes, dear, we'll do anything to help."

"But I have a little story to tell, first. Robert was once my lover. We quarrelled, and later he married my sister. He has been as devoted a husband as woman ever had, and my sister never knew that he cared for me—she was so much younger. But I have a letter from him, telling how he has longed these last years to see me, and begging me to come home. Do you suppose I would refuse? But, and her voice rang with a new tone, "I'm going to bring him back with me. He will get well here; he must! His sister, who kept his home, has recently married, and will be glad to let me have the children—they are doubly mine. For girls, I'm going to marry Robert. That's the only way I can get him to come—and, oh! it's the best way! It was my fault that we were separated, and he cannot refuse his only chance of life—and love! Why don't you say something? Why don't you wish me joy?"

Grief had given place to hope, now, tears to smiles, pallor to blushes. And just as a woman's tried love is grander than a girl's can be, so now Eloise was enwrapped by a flood of feeling, of which the sweetness, the completeness, was as far above any which these girls had experienced, as the crest of their beloved Mt. Sopris was above the waves of the Atlantic. She also had forgotten the paper locked in each girl's desk. But the girls remembered. Sarah and Eliza slipped from the room, while Anna boldly said:

"It's all very sad and beautiful, Eloise, and you have

our full sympathy and best wishes. But have you forgotten the little document you signed and gave to each of us?"

"That! Surely, Anna, you couldn't consider that, in the face of any real emergency! Think of——" but Anna, the unemotional Anna, broke down and sobbed bitterly, as she stuttered:

"Can't—can't—any—any—one—have an—an emergency—emergency—but you!"

"Why, Anna, my dear! What do you mean?" and Eloise crossed quickly to the couch upon which the girl had thrown herself. "Sarah, what ails her? Do you know?"

The other girls had reappeared, and Eliza came to her chum's side. Laying her hand gently upon the head pressed into the pillow, she turned to the elder girl:

"Eloise, you say that you are going to marry. How about the bargain you made with us?" and she looked very stern.

Eloise turned from Anna and faced—legal documents!

"Don't joke, Eliza. You seem to forget that this is a matter of life and death." But Eliza was firm, as the unhappiness of the past year rose before her.

"It's no joke, Eloise. Give up our papers, release us from our promise, or pay us each \$300. Then where is your money for trips East, for marriages, for family trips West again?"

Anna had in the meantime slipped out, and now re-

turned with her paper. With a hurt look that almost proved the undoing of her friends, Eloise said, proudly:

"Never would I have believed it of any one of you! To do this at such a time!" and she walked from the room, with a face whiter than ever.

"Oh, Eliza! It's too cruel! I can't!" exclaimed Sarah, while Anna tried to keep her own heart from melting.

"You can't understand, of course, Sarah," replied Eliza, with a superior air. "Anna and I know what it is to suffer." And Sarah looked pityingly at each, but kept her own counsel. And then Eloise re-entered the room. She laid the three papers upon the table, accepted the other three, tore them in halves and dropped them into the waste basket. How tall and stern she looked, and how reproachful, as she turned and faced the girls. But now Eliza was undone.

"Oh, you poor dear! Do you think you have fallen among cannibals?" and she half carried her over to the couch. "Now listen," and very vividly, with some tears, she recounted her own experience, and then Anna's.

Eloise was shocked, grieved at her friends' trials; hurt at their lack of confidence.

"You wouldn't have thought me such a fiend, would you, dear?" and she held out her hand to Sarah. That young lady became a whole surprise party in herself as she ran to her friend, crying:

"Oh, but I did!, I did" and, haltingly, she told her story. "But, dear, it wasn't all from fear of you, but because no one of us wanted to be the first to spoil this

lovely home and appear ungrateful to our dearest 'big sister.' "

Eloise remembered with a happy thrill that "the littlest one" would stay always in Midvale, and, trying to still the uneasy doubt that the thought of Edgar's long wait brought to her mind, she rose, saying briskly:

"And now, girls, you each must run away and write a letter. Yes, I insist! Make them short and sweet, and then come and help me."

That night two important letters were carried eastward by the train that whirled Eloise to her old lover; another letter, equally important, lay in the Midvale postoffice until morning.

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